

## Guitar Red

End of the Year Roundup

The Sunday Night Blues Project, December 11, 2008

<http://sundaynightbluesproject.blogspot.com/2008/12/2008-end-of-year-roundup.html>



2008 has been a very good year for blues lovers, with an armload of great cds released. I heard really good releases this year by veteran artists like Magic Slim, Buddy Guy, BB King, and Byther Smith. I heard really good releases by newer artists like Moreland & Arbuckle and Eden Brent and Samuel James. I heard blues music that you might have missed from artists like D. Johnson, Jo Buddy & Down Home King III and Gina Sicilia. Those ten blues artists I just named each made worthy cds in 2008, each of them plenty good enough to capture an hour of your time. Let me speak a few words about the methodology I used. I eliminated the collection-sets, and I eliminated best of sets, and I eliminated re-issues. The ten artists following are all terrific, and, with one exception, should be making great music for years to come. These are my top ten cds of 2008.

1. Albert Castiglia "These Are The Days." (Blues Leaf) Not necessarily because Albert made the single best blues song of 2008 in his remake of 'Night Time Is The Right Time' but because 'Loan Me A Dime' is just as good. And 'Catfish' is the best Dylan cover of the year. Albert made an entire cd without a weak link. His singing and his guitar work are both top-notch, and I expect in 10 years he will make 5 or 6 more cds just as good or even better than this one.
2. Sean Costello "We Can Get Together." (Delta Groove) Sean's cd came out in February and he left us in April. His death breaks my heart still, because Sean was a shining star on the rise. The cd he left us is just great, with great vocals, great guitar work, great writing-- but it will always be tinged with the lost promise. It is still hard for me to listen to 'Going Home.' Sigh.
3. Bernie Pearl "Old School Blues." (Indy) After listening to Sean Costello this seems a joyful antidote. This 2 disc set is a shining musicology lesson of the history of the blues and a finger picking celebration of life and love and loss. Bernie makes good music and lifts the spirit. I wish this guy would come east and play at Eddie's Attic some night with an acoustic guitar--it would be great to hear him. A special shout out to Mike Berry for great bass playing throughout.
4. Dave Gross "Crawling The Walls." (Vizztone) This cd was supposedly recorded

live in the studio. At first I was doubtful, but then I listened to it again and again, and I began to say "well, maybe." This disc snuck up on me--the more I let it talk to me, the more impressive it became. Dave Gross is one helluva good guitar player and singer, but he may be an even better arranger and producer. This is a fine fine release.

5. Janiva Magness "What Love Will Do." (Alligator) For those of you who think this is a token pick, you don't know Janiva. She can sing rings around ALL the other women singers out there, and this is the best cd she has yet made, and she is sexy as hell. This is my BMW pick--she belongs on this list every year on sheer talent. She may one day be the best of them all.

6. Ian Parker "The Official Bootleg." (Indy) I was talking with Geoff Achison last summer about Guitar Player magazine naming him one of the Top 10 Guitar players, and he told me that his favorite guitar player was Ian Parker. After that, I stayed up one whole night listening to Ian through the headphones, and as the sun began to rise in the East I got what Geoff was talking about. He reminds me a little of the young Chris Whitley, which is high praise indeed.

7. Steve Guyger "Radio Blues." (Severn) I first heard Steve when he did "Living Legends" with Paul Oscher. He is my favorite blues harmonica player, and he just keeps getting better. Don't believe it? Listen to him. He made two great cds this year, and I love "Radio Blues." It just barely beat out Dennis Gruenling's cd "I Just Keep Loving Him," which is a fine tribute to Little Walter.

8. Chris James & Patrick Rynn "Stop And Think About It." (Earwig) The best road trip cd in the bunch. These two guys are half of the Rhythm Room All Stars in Phoenix Arizona, and the way they lay down the goods it tempts me to make a road trip all the way out there to catch them live. The most pleasurable trip I ever drove from Atlanta GA to St Louis MO was with this fine cd in the player on repeat. I may have to buy another copy of this just so I can listen to it in the house.

9. The Mannish Boys "Lowdown Feelin.'" (Delta Groove) This was a difficult choice for me. The Mannish Boys or Nick Moss & the Flip Tops? Both made fine music in 2008. I finally decided on The Mannish Boys because this is their fourth great cd. Good honest blues music. This collection of great West Coast players is built around the great drum work of Richard 'Big Foot' Innes, who has been making great blues music since the mid 60s. Nick Moss can look forward to being on the 2009 list.

**10. Guitar Red "Lightnin' In A Bottle." (Backspace Records)** Debut cd from an incredible street musician here in Decatur Georgia. Billy Christian Walls' energy and joy at making music is infectious--I have seen people who missed appointments because they could not stop listening to him and go back to work. One man, one guitar, one voice. I think they only made 400 copies of this cd. I have now bought 5 of them at Decatur CD and given all but one away.

And while I'm wrapping up 2008, I'm already looking forward to the 2009 releases, especially the next cds from John Nemeth and Moreland & Arbuckle.